



The Impact of Strategic Management on Operational Performance: Investigating the Mediating Role of Organizational Culture in the Saudi Steel Manufacturing Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of strategic management on operational performance in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, focusing on the mediating role of organizational culture. A quantitative research approach was employed, with data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 341 employees from various steel manufacturing companies. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was utilized to test the proposed hypotheses and assess the relationships between strategic management practices, organizational culture, and operational performance. Results indicated that strategic management significantly influences operational performance, and organizational culture plays a crucial mediating role in enhancing this relationship. The findings highlight the importance of fostering a robust organizational culture to optimize the effectiveness of strategic management initiatives, ultimately improving operational performance in the steel manufacturing sector. This research provides valuable insights for managers and policymakers aiming to enhance performance in industrial sectors through strategic management and cultural alignment.

1. Introduction

The steel manufacturing sector is a key element of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil revenues (AlTaweel & Al-Hawary, 2021). Faced with increasing global competition, technological advancements, and the need for sustainable practices, strategic management becomes essential for enhancing operational performance and maintaining a competitive edge (Kale, Aknar, & Başar, 2019). Strategic management involves developing and implementing initiatives that align with long-term objectives, ensuring organizations remain adaptable and resilient in dynamic market conditions (Zhang, Khan, Lee, & Salik, 2019). Operational performance, which assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational processes, is crucial for success in the steel manufacturing sector (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Achieving high operational performance relies not only on strategic initiatives but also significantly on organizational culture—the shared values and norms that influence employee behavior and foster innovation and continuous improvement (Eniola et al., 2019). A strong organizational culture ensures that employees' actions are aligned with strategic goals, facilitating the successful implementation of strategic management practices and enhancing operational outcomes (Rehman, Bhatti, & Chaudhry, 2019).

Despite the critical roles of strategic management and organizational culture, there is limited research focused specifically on the Saudi steel manufacturing sector. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how strategic management impacts operational performance, with organizational culture acting as a mediator. Utilizing a quantitative approach and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the research seeks to provide empirical insights that can inform strategic decision-making and cultural initiatives within Saudi steel companies. The findings will contribute to the literature by offering evidence from a non-Western context, enriching the understanding of how strategy and culture interact to drive performance in the steel industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategic Management

Strategic management encompasses the formulation and implementation of major goals and initiatives taken by an organization's top management on behalf of owners, based on consideration of resources and an assessment of the internal and external environments in which the organization operates (AlTaweel & Al-Hawary, 2021). It involves strategic planning, strategic analysis, strategy formulation, and strategy implementation, all aimed at enhancing organizational performance and achieving long-term objectives. Effective strategic management enables organizations to navigate complex and dynamic environments, ensuring sustained competitive advantage and operational excellence (Kale, Aknar, & Başar, 2019).

2.1 Operational Performance

Operational performance refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which an organization converts inputs into outputs, encompassing various dimensions such as productivity, quality, cost management, and customer satisfaction (Kale et al., 2019). It is a critical indicator of an organization's ability to achieve its strategic goals and sustain competitive advantage. Operational performance is influenced by multiple factors, including strategic management practices, technological advancements, and organizational capabilities (Zhang, Khan, Lee, & Salik, 2019).

2.2 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as the set of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence the way employees think, feel, and behave within an organization (Aboramadan, Albashiti, Alharazin, & Zaidoune, 2020). It plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational behavior, fostering innovation, and enhancing overall performance. A strong organizational culture aligns employees' actions with the organization's strategic objectives, facilitating effective communication, collaboration, and adaptability (Eniola, Olorunleke, Akintimehin, Ojeka, & Oyetunji, 2019). Moreover, organizational culture is particularly significant in non-Western contexts, where cultural values and practices may differ markedly from Western paradigms, thereby influencing management practices and organizational outcomes (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

2.3 Strategic Management and Operational Performance

The relationship between strategic management and operational performance has been extensively examined in the literature. Strategic management practices, including strategic planning, resource allocation, and performance monitoring, have been shown to significantly enhance operational performance by improving efficiency, fostering innovation, and enabling organizations to respond proactively to market changes (AlTaweel & Al-Hawary, 2021; Kale et al., 2019). For instance, Kale et al. (2019) highlight that strategic agility, a component of strategic management, positively influences firm performance through the enhancement of absorptive capacity. Similarly, AlTaweel and Al-Hawary (2021) demonstrate that strategic agility, supported by innovation capability, mediates the relationship between strategic management and organizational performance, underscoring the importance of adaptive and forward-looking strategies in achieving operational excellence.

2.4 Organizational Culture as a Mediator

Organizational culture has been identified as a critical mediator in the relationship between strategic management and operational performance. A conducive organizational culture facilitates the effective implementation of strategic initiatives by aligning employee behavior with strategic objectives, promoting a shared vision, and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and continuous improvement (Rehman, Bhatti, & Chaudhry, 2019). Shao (2019) further emphasizes that strategic leadership behaviors interact with organizational culture to enhance strategic alignment and enterprise systems assimilation, thereby improving operational performance. Additionally, Rehman et al. (2019) illustrate that an innovative culture mediates the impact of leadership styles on organizational performance, highlighting the role of cultural factors in translating strategic directives into tangible performance outcomes.

2.5 Organizational Culture in Non-Western Contexts

In non-Western contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, organizational culture assumes added significance due to distinct cultural norms, values, and social structures that influence organizational dynamics and management practices (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Studies conducted in similar non-Western settings reveal that organizational culture not only mediates but also moderates the relationship between strategic management practices and organizational performance. For example, Aboramadan et al. (2020) find that in non-Western organizations, a supportive culture enhances the positive effects of strategic initiatives on innovation and performance. Similarly, Naveed, Alhaidan, Al Halbusi, and Al-Swidi (2022) argue that organizational culture is pivotal in fostering innovation and organizational effectiveness, particularly in contexts where resistance to change may be prevalent.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

While existing research underscores the significance of strategic management and organizational culture in enhancing operational performance, there remains a paucity of studies focusing specifically on the Saudi steel manufacturing sector. Most studies have been conducted in Western or generalized non-Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the unique cultural and industrial dynamics of Saudi Arabia's steel industry. Additionally, the mediating role of organizational culture in this specific sector has not been extensively explored, necessitating empirical investigation to validate its impact within the Saudi context. Furthermore, the interplay between strategic management practices and organizational culture in driving operational performance in highly industrialized and culturally distinct settings like Saudi Arabia warrants deeper exploration.

2.7 The Mediating Role of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture not only facilitates the implementation of strategic initiatives but also enhances their effectiveness by fostering an environment that supports strategic objectives (Kordab, Raudeliūnienė, & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2020). For instance, Kordab et al. (2020) demonstrate that knowledge management practices, mediated by organizational culture, significantly contribute to sustainable organizational performance. Similarly, Upadhyay and Kumar (2020) highlight that

organizational culture and internal analytical knowledge mediate the relationship between big data analytics capabilities and firm performance, emphasizing the role of culture in leveraging technological advancements for operational gains. These findings collectively suggest that organizational culture serves as a crucial intermediary that transforms strategic management practices into enhanced operational performance.

2.8 Implications for the Saudi Steel Manufacturing Sector

In the context of the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, the integration of strategic management and a supportive organizational culture is imperative for achieving superior operational performance. The sector is characterized by intense competition, technological advancements, and the need for sustainable practices, all of which require robust strategic frameworks and a culture that promotes innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement (Hadid & Al-Sayed, 2021). Given the cultural nuances of Saudi Arabia, fostering an organizational culture that aligns with strategic objectives can significantly enhance the effectiveness of management initiatives and drive operational excellence (Rehman et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the mediating role of organizational culture is essential for managers and policymakers aiming to optimize strategic management practices and achieve desired performance outcomes in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the impact of strategic management on operational performance, with organizational culture serving as a mediating variable within the Saudi steel manufacturing sector. A cross-sectional approach was adopted to collect data at a single point in time, ensuring the capture of relevant information pertinent to the current operational and strategic dynamics of the industry. The target population comprised employees from various steel manufacturing companies in Saudi Arabia, and a stratified random sampling method was utilized to ensure representation across different organizational levels and departments. A structured questionnaire, developed based on validated scales from existing literature (e.g., AlTaweel & Al-Hawary, 2021; Aboramadan et al., 2020), was administered to 341 respondents, yielding a high response rate that enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings. The questionnaire encompassed sections measuring strategic management practices, organizational culture, and operational performance, utilizing Likert-scale items to quantify respondents' perceptions and experiences. Data collection procedures adhered to ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality assurances, to ensure participant trust and data integrity. For data analysis, the study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software, which is well-suited for complex models and small to medium sample sizes (Chaudhuri et al., 2024). PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to simultaneously assess the measurement model and structural model, allowing for the evaluation of both direct and indirect relationships between variables. Reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), ensuring robust measurement properties (Table 2). Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 3). The structural model was then tested to examine the hypothesized relationships, including the mediating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between strategic management and operational performance (Table 4). This methodological approach aligns with established research principles, providing a comprehensive framework to elucidate the intricate interplay between strategic management, organizational culture, and operational performance in the context of Saudi Arabia's steel manufacturing sector.

4. Findings

The primary aim of this study was to examine the impact of strategic management on operational performance within the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, focusing on the mediating role of organizational culture. This research is significant as the steel industry is pivotal to Saudi Arabia's economic diversification and industrial growth. By exploring how strategic management practices influence operational outcomes and the role of organizational culture, the study provides essential insights for enhancing competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth in a technologically advancing and globally competitive market.

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 show mean scores of 3.650 for strategic management (SM), 3.800 for organizational culture (OC), and 3.900 for operational performance (OP) on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive perceptions among respondents. The standard deviations (SM: 0.820, OC: 0.770, OP: 0.750) suggest moderate variability, while the negative skewness and kurtosis values indicate a normal distribution of responses. These results support the hypothesis that effective strategic management and a strong organizational culture are positively associated with enhanced operational performance, aligning with existing literature (Upadhyay & Kumar, 2020).

The study confirms that strategic management significantly influences operational performance, with organizational culture acting as a crucial mediator. This finding aligns with Shao (2019) and Umair and Dilanchiev (2022), who emphasize the interplay between strategy, culture, and performance. Additionally, Upadhyay and Kumar (2020) and Zhang et al. (2019) highlight the importance of mediating factors in enhancing organizational outcomes. These results contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence from the Saudi context, demonstrating that fostering a supportive and innovative organizational culture is essential for maximizing strategic management effectiveness. Future

research could explore additional mediators or extend the analysis to other sectors to further understand the dynamics between strategy, culture, and performance.

Table: 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Strategic Management (SM)	3.650	0.820	-0.230	-0.710
Organizational Culture (OC)	3.800	0.770	-0.150	-0.650
Operational Performance (OP)	3.900	0.750	-0.120	-0.590

Table 2 presents the model measurements for the constructs of strategic management (SM), organizational culture (OC), and operational performance (OP). The Cronbach's Alpha values for SM (0.850), OC (0.870), and OP (0.860) exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating high internal consistency. Composite Reliability scores for all constructs are above 0.80 (SM: 0.880; OC: 0.890; OP: 0.890), further affirming the reliability of the measurement instruments. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for SM (0.650), OC (0.680), and OP (0.660) surpass the 0.50 benchmark, indicating strong convergent validity. These metrics confirm that the constructs are measured reliably and validly, supporting the study's hypotheses that strategic management positively influences operational performance and that organizational culture effectively mediates this relationship (Kale, Aknar, & Başar, 2019; Khan et al., 2019; Kordab, Raudeliūnienė, & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2020; Naveed et al., 2022; Rehman, Bhatti, & Chaudhry, 2019).

Synthesizing the findings, it is evident that organizational culture plays a pivotal role in enhancing the impact of strategic management on operational performance. The robust reliability and validity of the measurement scales reinforce the credibility of these results. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from the Saudi context, highlighting how a supportive and innovative organizational culture can amplify the benefits of strategic management practices (Rehman et al., 2019). For practitioners in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, these insights emphasize the necessity of cultivating a strong organizational culture to maximize strategic initiatives and achieve superior operational outcomes. Future research could explore additional mediating factors or extend the analysis to other industrial sectors within Saudi Arabia to further understand the dynamics between strategy, culture, and performance.

Table: 2 Model measurements

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Strategic Management (SM)	0.850	0.880	0.650
Organizational Culture (OC)	0.870	0.890	0.680
Operational Performance (OP)	0.860	0.890	0.660

Table 3 presents the results of the discriminant analysis, which assesses the discriminant validity of the constructs: Strategic Management (SM), Organizational Culture (OC), and Operational Performance (OP). The diagonal values (0.806 for SM, 0.824 for OC, and 0.812 for OP) represent the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, while the off-diagonal values indicate the correlations between different constructs. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of each construct's AVE is greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, all diagonal values exceed the corresponding off-diagonal correlations (e.g., SM-OC: 0.620, SM-OP: 0.550, OC-OP: 0.600), confirming that each construct is distinct and that the measurement model possesses adequate discriminant validity.

The strong correlations between SM and OC (0.620), SM and OP (0.550), and OC and OP (0.600) suggest substantial interrelationships among these constructs. These relationships are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes the intertwined nature of strategic management, organizational culture, and operational performance. For instance, Rehman, Bhatti, and Chaudhry (2019) highlight the mediating role of innovative culture in enhancing organizational performance, while Naveed et al. (2022) discuss how organizational culture is pivotal in fostering innovation and effectiveness. Similarly, Khan et al. (2019) demonstrate that innovation mediates the relationship between corporate governance and organizational performance, moderated by an innovative culture. These studies support the notion that a strong organizational culture not only complements strategic management but also amplifies its positive effects on operational performance.

Furthermore, the high internal consistency and convergent validity of the measurement scales, as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.80 for all constructs, reinforce the reliability of the findings (Kordab, Raudeliūnienė, & Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, 2020). Kale, Aknar, and Başar (2019) also emphasize the importance of reliable measurement instruments in assessing the mediating roles within organizational studies. The robust measurement model in this study ensures that the observed relationships are both valid and reliable, providing a solid foundation for interpreting the mediating effects of organizational culture on the relationship between strategic management and operational performance.

Table: 3 Discriminant analysis

Construct	SM	OC	OP
Strategic Management (SM)	0.806		
Organizational Culture (OC)	0.620	0.824	
Operational Performance (OP)	0.550	0.600	0.812

Table 4 presents the path analysis results, revealing that strategic management has a strong direct effect on operational performance ($\beta = 0.500$, $t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$) and a substantial impact on organizational culture ($\beta = 0.650$, $t = 10.45$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational culture, in turn, significantly affects operational performance ($\beta = 0.400$, $t = 6.211$, $p < 0.001$), and the indirect effect of strategic management on operational performance through organizational culture is also significant ($\beta = 0.260$, $t = 5.780$, $p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that organizational culture effectively mediates the relationship between strategic management and operational performance, aligning with previous studies that highlight the pivotal role of culture in enhancing strategic outcomes (AlTaweel & Al-Hawary, 2021; Aboramadan et al., 2020).

The strength and significance of these relationships suggest that strategic management practices are foundational not only in shaping organizational culture but also in directly boosting operational performance. The mediating role of organizational culture indicates that fostering a positive and innovative culture can amplify the benefits of strategic initiatives, leading to improved performance outcomes. For the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, these insights emphasize the need for managers to integrate strategic planning with deliberate cultural development efforts. By cultivating an organizational culture that supports strategic goals, companies can achieve higher operational efficiency and sustain competitive advantage in the market (Chaudhuri et al., 2024; Eniola et al., 2019; Hadid & Al-Sayed, 2021).

Table: 4 Path analysis

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-Value	p-Value
Strategic Management $\rightarrow$ Operational Performance	0.500	8.12	<0.001
Strategic Management $\rightarrow$ Organizational Culture	0.650	10.45	<0.001
Organizational Culture $\rightarrow$ Operational Performance	0.400	6.211	<0.001
Indirect Effect (Mediation):			
Strategic Management $\rightarrow$ Organizational Culture $\rightarrow$ Operational Performance	0.260	5.780	<0.001

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant impact of strategic management on operational performance within the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, with organizational culture playing a pivotal mediating role. The results reveal that strategic management practices directly enhance operational performance ($\beta = 0.500$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the essential role of well-formulated and effectively implemented strategies in driving efficiency and productivity. Furthermore, strategic management significantly influences organizational culture ($\beta = 0.650$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that strategic initiatives are instrumental in shaping a culture that supports organizational goals. The mediating effect of organizational culture ($\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates that a robust and supportive culture amplifies the positive effects of strategic management on operational performance. These findings align with AlTaweel and Al-Hawary (2021), who emphasized that strategic agility and effective management practices are crucial for enhancing organizational performance.

The implications of these findings are profound for managers and policymakers within the Saudi steel manufacturing sector. By demonstrating that organizational culture significantly mediates the relationship between strategic management and operational performance, the study highlights the necessity for organizations to cultivate a culture that aligns with strategic objectives. This alignment fosters an environment conducive to innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement, which are critical for maintaining competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market. Aboramadan et al. (2020) support this notion, illustrating that a strong organizational culture fosters innovation and enhances performance, particularly in non-Western contexts. Similarly, Chaudhuri et al. (2024) found that a data-driven culture mediates the relationship between business analytics and organizational performance, reinforcing the importance of culture in strategic implementation. These insights suggest that strategic initiatives alone are insufficient without a supportive cultural framework to ensure their effective execution and to maximize their impact on operational performance.

Comparing these findings with existing literature, the study corroborates the established understanding that organizational culture is integral to the successful implementation of strategic management practices. Eniola et al. (2019) demonstrated that organizational culture significantly impacts total quality management in SMEs, while Hadid and Al-Sayed (2021) highlighted the role of culture in strategic management accounting and information systems integration. These studies, along with the present research, collectively emphasize that a harmonious relationship between strategy and culture is essential for achieving superior performance outcomes. Additionally, the study extends the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence from the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, a context that has been relatively

underexplored in the literature. This contribution is particularly valuable as it highlights the unique cultural dynamics and strategic challenges faced by organizations in this region, offering nuanced insights that can inform both academic research and practical management practices.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge for both practitioners and future research. Managers in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector should prioritize the development of an organizational culture that supports strategic objectives, fostering values such as innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement. This can be achieved through targeted cultural initiatives, leadership development programs, and the integration of cultural considerations into strategic planning processes. Furthermore, future research could explore additional mediating or moderating variables, such as technological capability or employee engagement, to further elucidate the complex interplay between strategic management and operational performance. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how changes in strategic management and organizational culture over time impact performance outcomes. By addressing these areas, future studies can build on the current research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive operational excellence in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of strategic management on operational performance within the Saudi steel manufacturing sector, emphasizing the mediating role of organizational culture. The key findings reveal that strategic management practices significantly enhance operational performance, underscoring the importance of well-formulated and effectively implemented strategies in driving efficiency and productivity. Additionally, organizational culture was found to play a crucial mediating role, facilitating the translation of strategic initiatives into tangible performance outcomes. These results contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a non-Western context, highlighting the unique interplay between strategy and culture in enhancing organizational performance. For practitioners, the study offers valuable insights into how strategic management and a supportive organizational culture can synergistically improve operational outcomes in the highly competitive and technologically advanced Saudi steel industry.

The practical implications of this research are profound for managers and leaders in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector. To leverage strategic management practices effectively, organizations should prioritize the development of a strong and innovative organizational culture that aligns with their strategic objectives. This can be achieved through initiatives such as leadership development programs, cultural alignment workshops, and the integration of cultural values into strategic planning processes. By fostering a culture that supports innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement, companies can maximize the benefits of their strategic initiatives and achieve superior operational performance. Furthermore, this study suggests that future research should explore additional mediating factors, such as technological capabilities or employee engagement, to further elucidate the complex relationships between strategic management, organizational culture, and operational performance. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into how these dynamics evolve over time, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive sustained performance excellence in the Saudi steel manufacturing sector.

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